

Peacetime Engagement: Devising the Army's Role

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For 45 years, the specter of a Soviet attack on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization dominated American strategic thought. Two generations of US military planners and national policy decisionmakers viewed such an attack as the principal scenario that could propel the United States into another war on the European continent. Escalation to thermonuclear war, though improbable, posed the greatest danger. In consequence, doctrine writers dedicated their efforts to countering the Soviet threat.

As outlined in *National Military Strategy of the United States*, published in January 1992 by the Department of Defense, the fundamental objective of America's armed forces remains constant: to deter aggression and, should deterrence fail, to defend the nation's vital interests against any potential foe.¹ Strategic deterrence against nuclear attack is still a cornerstone of national military policy, but the recent changes in the international arena present new opportunities for planners to restructure forces, to reallocate resources, and to reexamine the roles and missions of our military forces. America's challenge in the post-Cold War world is to develop a new policy to replace containment and a supporting strategy to address the enduring realities that guide military planning. A national military strategy based on strategic deterrence and defense, forward presence, crisis response, and reconstitution appears sufficient with respect to potential military threats, but it fails to address adequately operations short of armed conflict. Additionally, *National Military Strategy* and related service documents introduce several new terms, such as "forward presence operations," the "continuum of military operations," and the "spectrum of conventional conflict." This evolving taxonomy itself testifies to the confusion that has been introduced into the strategic environment and demands informed discussion by doctrinal specialists.

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This article begins with the premise that “peacetime engagement” is the emerging national policy of the United States in the post-Cold War world. For purposes of this analysis, peacetime engagement refers to a national security policy that coordinates the application of political, economic, and military means to promote stability and to reduce the likelihood of hostilities. Peacetime engagement not only fills the strategic void between the policy of containment and our evolving national military strategy based on power projection and the selective application of military power, it also forms the peacetime dimension of our national security strategy. This emerging concept serves as a guide for winning the peace and preventing war. This article not only examines the evolution of the policy, but also focuses on the possible implications of peacetime engagement on the structure and role of the US Army. While fighting our nation’s wars remains the Army’s principal mission, peacetime engagement presents a new approach for the Army to assist in meeting the nation’s peacetime objectives.

Responding to the dramatic changes in eastern Europe and in the Commonwealth of Independent States, President Bush has devised and implemented a new national security strategy calling for a significant reduction and restructuring of the nation’s military forces. In his speech to the Aspen Institute on 2 August 1990, Bush outlined the formidable task of shaping defense capabilities to the changing strategic circumstances. An important component of his strategy is a concept he termed “peacetime engagement,” a “policy every bit as constant and committed to the defense of our interests and ideals in today’s world as in times of conflict and Cold War.”² He later added that America must be prepared to respond to threats in whatever part of the globe they occur. New sources of instability require “a strong and engaged America.”³

To counter future threats to US interests inherent in the uncertainty and instability of a rapidly changing world, Bush stated that the United States would remain actively engaged in promoting free and expanding markets and would pursue throughout the postwar period a policy of engagement in support of stability and security. From these basic assertions evolved the concept of peacetime engagement that Secretary of Defense Cheney translated into his defense guidance and testimony before Congress.

In a prepared statement before the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee on 19 February 1991, Cheney identified peacetime engagement

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**NATIONAL SECURITY IN TRANSITION . . .
. . . NEW POLICIES AND STRATEGIES**

	COLD WAR — BIPOLAR WORLD	POST-COLD WAR — NEW WORLD ORDER
NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY:	Containment	Peacetime Engagement
NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY:	Flexible Response (Deterrence)	Discriminate Response (Deterrence & Influence)
NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY:	Forward Defense, Rapid Reinforcement (Focused on Global War)	Forward Presence, Crisis Response (Focused on Regional Contingencies)
OUTCOMES:	Collective Security, Bipolar Confrontation	World Community Consensus, Orderly Transition

as an approach to deter low-intensity conflicts and to promote stability in the Third World.⁴ Themes introduced in his testimony included promoting stability and peace to protect democracies, assisting nations to help themselves, coordinating with other government agencies to achieve national objectives, and using military force as a tool of last resort. Calling for innovative strategies that support representative government, integrate security assistance, and promote economic development, Cheney defined peacetime engagement as a coordinated combination of political, economic, and military actions aimed primarily at counteracting local violence and promoting nation-building.

Despite Cheney's efforts to articulate the strategy of peacetime engagement, no consensus within the Department of Defense emerged as to which agency or combination of agencies had the responsibility for taking the lead. In an attempt to clarify DOD policy on peacetime engagement and to eliminate the confusion surrounding responsibility for implementing it, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict,⁵ with urging from the Army-Air Force Center for Low-Intensity Conflict, convened the Peacetime Engagement Conference in Washington in July 1991. Present at the conference were representatives of the Department of State, Department of Defense, the branches of the armed services, the Joint Staff, and other agencies. The purposes of the conference were to address several challenges concerning peacetime engagement and its associated concepts and programs: lack of common terminology; lack of common definitions and relationships among terms and programs; lack of broad awareness of this emerging concept; and incomplete integration of the concept in overall DOD and US policies and strategies.⁶

Although the attendees did not reach a consensus on precise definitions, several important concepts did emerge. The conferees concluded that peacetime engagement encompasses all US security policy in an environment short of war and therefore is broader than low-intensity conflict. Peacetime engagement also is a manifestation of forward presence, so that it includes conflict resolution, influence-building activities, and developmental programs to minimize the possible adverse effects of coercive measures taken during crises. Most important, the participants concluded that the Department of State, not the Department of Defense, should have the lead in coordinating actions related to peacetime engagement.⁷

In essence, peacetime engagement calls for the coordinated application of political, economic, and military means to promote stability and counteract violence. It is intended to address root causes of instability, thereby promoting peace and precluding the need for a US combat response to crises.

What then are the implications of peacetime engagement for Army force planners? Does peacetime engagement offer the Army an opportunity to address the root causes of instability that lead to warfare? Are additional forces necessary to support an active peacetime engagement effort? How does peacetime engagement affect the roles and missions of the Army? The answers to these questions are quite complex, but the Army must be prepared to perform a variety of diverse missions in a nonhostile environment.

Before addressing these issues, force planners must understand that peacetime engagement is a national security policy and not a war-fighting strategy. As such, the policy should never be allowed to detract from the Army's primary mission of successfully waging war in accordance with directives from the National Command Authority. The Army's fundamental purposes must always be to deter war and, if deterrence fails, to achieve victory on the battlefield. For these purposes Army planners will continue to seek improvements in joint and combined war-fighting doctrine, which proved so successful in the Gulf War.

With regard to the opportunities presented by the concept of peacetime engagement, however, planners must shift their focus to a national security policy aimed at achieving the national objective of promoting regional stability. They must turn their attention to eliminating the root causes of instability. The military support of this policy represents a new attempt to address the conditions that have led to military conflict in the past. The Army's role in peacetime engagement activities will be widely varied, requiring special sensitivity and often interagency coordination.⁸

How will the Army support this effort? First, doctrine writers must accommodate this changing strategic environment and the full breadth of military missions across the continuum of military operations. Missions such

as stability operations, noncombatant evacuations, and demonstrations of force, as well as activities that contribute to the general domestic welfare of assisted nations, should become commonplace for the Army in the post-Cold War environment. As Brigadier General John Ellerson, director of operations for US Southern Command in Panama, has put it, "Since Just Cause, almost 60 percent of our operations are peacetime engagements like drug interdiction. . . . We need some doctrinal guidance, particularly for outside units that come to support our efforts."⁹ One hopes that the current revision of FM 100-5 will remedy this absence of doctrinal guidance.

Second, Army planners must attend to promoting long-term stability and sustainable host-nation development as a way to preempt violence, to reduce threats to American interests, and to assist domestic governments in developing their own reform and infrastructural programs. Good examples of such actions are the counter-drug and counterterrorism efforts that have made substantial gains during recent years. *Army Long-Range Planning Guidance, FY 2001-2021* specifically calls for Army planners to develop forces to support counter-drug programs and other operations in support of civil authorities.¹⁰ Commanders of the unified and specified commands, and their subordinate commanders, must seek innovative ways to support US ambassadors with their country plans by providing military resources as the means to counter the threats posed by drugs, poverty, famine, medical crises, and other causes of instability.

Support of the Department of State's country team is crucial for success. The ambassador is the representative not only of the President and Secretary of State, but of all US agencies in country. Consequently, the ambassador has great latitude in the operational aspects of peacetime engagement. The Army, of course, must fully support this effort.

Third, the Army should emphasize nation assistance as a clear mission and an integral part of peacetime engagement. Nation assistance is an inter-agency effort designed to help host nations in developing and maintaining their own essential governmental, military, and socioeconomic institutions to meet their societal needs. The objective of nation assistance is not to build or rebuild an entire nation, but to help nations attain sustainable development through assistance in assessment, management, skill transfer, education, and corrective action. The focus of such efforts ought to be on helping host countries to develop their own programs for security, stability, and economic growth. Such actions will contribute to strong domestic institutions and a stable infrastructure. Only through sustained progress in these areas can developing nations achieve internal stability. In the post-Cold War environment, US efforts in this regard should be selectively directed to those nations whose governmental policies conduce to long-term social, political, and economic stability.

Fourth, the Army will need to maintain forward presence in areas critical to US interests to demonstrate commitment, bolster allies within such

areas, promote regional stability, and provide a crisis-response capability. Forward presence can take numerous forms, including training missions, combined exercises, military-to-military exchanges, security and humanitarian assistance, and greater reliance on informal relationships and understandings with friendly governments.

Forward presence operations also should include the full participation of reserve component forces. National Guard and Army Reserve units boost the image of the United States by rendering assistance to foreign nations through a myriad of activities. In 1990, the Guard contributed to the Army's forward presence by deploying 21,475 personnel and 724 units for overseas training in 58 countries.¹¹ Reserve units also make significant contributions to regional stability by training with host-nation personnel and providing resources to medical support, engineer, and other humanitarian efforts.

Last, Army planners should second ongoing efforts within the Joint Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to promote the development of peacetime engagement within the context of interagency programs headed by the Department of State. As a prime player in future forward presence operations and peacetime engagement activities, the Army should be actively involved in refining and improving governmental planning to address this policy of peacetime engagement. Active participation in interagency conferences will be important to ensure the effectiveness of military forces involved in peacetime engagement activities.

There is certainly work to be done in refining the concept of peacetime engagement as our national security policy. At this juncture the concept appears in several security related documents but remains ill-defined. Meanwhile an increasing number of terms associated with peacetime engagement—such as "nation-building," "forward presence operations," and the "continuum of military operations," to name but a few—have found their way into the military lexicon. A National Security Decision Directive would be a useful mechanism to codify the policy of peacetime engagement. Such a directive would not only eliminate much of the current misunderstanding surrounding the term and make clear that peacetime engagement contains both national and strategic implications, but it would also provide a strategic framework to serve as the basis for more effective interagency coordination.

As an institution, the Army has much to offer in promoting peacetime engagement as a national security policy. The Army is the most capable service to carry out most peacetime engagement activities. Active and reserve forces are ideally suited for performing nation assistance, technical training, and security assistance. Engineers, military police, civic affairs, disaster relief, and transportation units, to say nothing of special operations forces,¹² possess unique capabilities to help a host country strengthen its own infrastructure and address the conditions that lead to instability and violence.

Although planners normally allocate forces to unified commanders based on their war-fighting missions, these may not be the most useful forces in the peacetime engagement or nation assistance role. Many combat support and combat service support forces are better suited for peacetime missions. Force planners must reassess this process so that such forces are included in the assigned force list and thus made available to the regional CINC to support peacetime operations.¹³

By focusing on peacetime operations, the Army can contribute to the alleviation of the conditions that have traditionally led to the employment of combat forces in conflict. Additionally, the Army can accomplish these missions without increases in numbers and materiel and without sacrificing its preparation for wartime missions. In the long term, war prevention is surely cost-effective; it reduces military and human costs by preserving peace. Peacetime engagement is by no means a panacea for all the problems in the developing world, but it is an important component in our emerging national security strategy. It is an effort in which the US Army can and should play a leading role.

NOTES

1. See *The National Military Strategy of the United States* (Washington: GPO, January 1992), p. 6. This document provides the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff's advice to the President and the Secretary of Defense in providing strategic direction for the armed forces.

2. See George Bush's speech to the Aspen Institute Symposium, 2 August 1991. Transcript is in Dick Cheney, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington: GPO, 1991), pp. 131-34.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

4. See *Statement of the Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney, Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee, in Connection with the FY 92-93 Budget for the Department of Defense*, 19 February 1991, as quoted in Richmond M. Lloyd et al., *Fundamentals of Force Planning, Vol. II: Defense Planning Cases* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, 1991), p. 19.

5. The office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict is a congressionally mandated innovation that has struggled to assert its identity with respect to roles and missions. Not fully integrated in the strategic planning arena, the office has made a significant effort to pursue the concept of peacetime engagement. As with any new institution, there have been growing pains, but the very existence of the office is indicative of the significance Congress attaches to the role of special operations and unconventional uses of military force.

6. For a summary of conference findings and conclusions of the Peacetime Engagement Conference, see Army-Air Force Center for Low Intensity Conflict, *Peacetime Engagement: A CLIC Conference Report* (Washington: Department of Defense, 1991), pp. 3-5.

7. *Ibid.*

8. See US Department of the Army, *The Army*, Field Manual 100-1 (Washington: GPO, December 1991), pp. 7-9, for official Army policy on peacetime engagement activities and other activities along the "continuum of military operations."

9. As quoted in Darrell Cochran, "Keeping Ahead of Change," *Soldiers*, March 1992, p. 33.

10. See *Army Long-Range Planning Guidance: FY 2001-2021*, pp. 11 and A-1. The planning guidance promulgates basic guidance for shaping the Total Army to enable it to fulfill its strategic roles for the next 30 years. The current edition was published in June 1991. The document is classified confidential, but all references to peacetime engagement and nation assistance are unclassified.

11. Gary L. Adams and Dwain L. Crowson, "The Army National Guard in a Changing Strategic Environment," *Military Review*, 71 (October 1991), 36.

12. With regard to special operations forces, see Carl W. Stiner, "US Special Operations Forces: A Strategic Perspective," *Parameters*, 22 (Summer 1992), 2-13.

13. This theme was also espoused by the attendees of the 1991 Peacetime Engagement Conference. See p. 4 of the conference proceedings.